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## Involuntary migration, context of reception, and social mobility: The case of Vietnamese refugee resettlement in the United States

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WIDER Working Paper 2018/14

## **Involuntary migration, context of reception, and social mobility**

**The case of Vietnamese refugee resettlement in the United States**

Carl L. Bankston III<sup>1</sup> and Min Zhou<sup>2</sup>

February 2018

**Abstract:** In this study, we examine the Vietnamese population of the United States as a case study in the integration of a refugee group in a host country. We approach this case in three parts. We first offer a brief review of Vietnamese refugee resettlement in the US and the making of a new ethnic community. We then provide a quantitative analysis of socioeconomic mobility among Vietnamese refugees using American Community Survey data from 1980 to 2015 and survey data. We examine how this ethnic population has changed over time by focusing on key socioeconomic indicators, such as poverty rates and levels of education, occupation, and income. Third, we seek to explain what enables Vietnamese refugees and their children to overcome initial disadvantage and move up in society based on our own work over the span of 20 years with in-depth qualitative data. We consider how policies, institutions (government, civil society, and ethnic), and patterns of social relations in the Vietnamese American community have interacted with individual agency to shape mobility.

**Keywords:** Refugee, involuntary migration, boat people, Vietnamese, mixed-niche strategy

**JEL classification:** J15, O15, R23, R28, Z13, Z18

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## 1 Introduction

The Vietnamese community of the United States came into being in a short period of time, starting in the mid-1970s, almost entirely through the involuntary migration of refugees. The case of Vietnamese refugee flight into the US was a precursor in many respects to global refugee movements, and it can thus provide important insight into the conditions under which involuntary migration may or may not result in the formation and integration of a new ethnic group in its host country. In this paper, we first offer a brief overview of Vietnamese refugee resettlement and the making of a new ethnic Vietnamese community. We then provide a quantitative analysis of social mobility among Vietnamese refugees using IPUMS (American Community Survey) data from 1980 to 2015 and other national-level data. We examine how this refugee group has changed over time by focusing on key socioeconomic indicators, such as levels of education, occupation, income, and poverty. Third, we explain what enables Vietnamese refugees and their children to overcome initial disadvantage and move up in society based on our own work over the span of 20 years and the works of other researchers. We argue that contexts of reception—state policies and multilevel institutions (government, civil society, and ethnic)—and patterns of ethnic social relations have interacted with individual agency to shape social mobility.

## 2 Conflict, involuntary migration, and resettlement

Armed conflict is the most common instigator of involuntary migration. This was as true of Viet Nam in the late twentieth century as it is of Afghanistan and Syria at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Viet Nam's conflicts, like those of other refugee-origin countries, involved combinations of foreign intervention and civil war, which inevitably led to refugee flight (Bankston and Hidalgo 2007).

### 2.1 US involvement in Viet Nam

The United States was militarily involved in Viet Nam after the Second World War. After a resounding military defeat by Viet Minh forces in May 1954, an international conference on Viet Nam in Geneva temporarily divided the country into North and South Viet Nam. North Viet Nam was ruled by a communist-dominated government—the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in Hanoi. South Viet Nam was entrusted to the French to create a State of Viet Nam with the emperor as chief of state and Catholic political leader Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister in Saigon. The United States and other non-communist countries quickly recognized the new State of Viet Nam, while China, the Soviet Union, and other communist countries recognized the government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. The geographic, ideological, and religious divisions produced the first mass refugee movements. Some South Vietnamese who sympathized with Ho Chi Minh's government moved north. About 1 million northerners, between 600,000 and 800,000 of whom were Catholics, fled south on US and French aircraft and naval vessels.

In 1961 President Kennedy sent military advisors to South Viet Nam to assist the beleaguered Diem government. Diem became increasingly unpopular in his own country, however, and in 1963 he was overthrown by a military coup, apparently with the knowledge and consent of the American government. The new leaders of South Viet Nam proved less able to maintain control than Diem and in 1965, with the South Vietnamese government on the verge of collapse, President Johnson sent in ground troops (Stewart 2012).

Many American military and political leaders believed they were winning the war through the end of 1967. At the beginning of 1968, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops launched the Tet Offensive, which convinced American leaders that victory, if possible at all, would not be quick or easy. It also increased the American public's opposition to the war. In 1973 the Paris peace talks ended with the United States agreeing on a timetable for withdrawing its troops and turning the war over to the South Vietnamese army. The South Vietnamese government was no better prepared to defend itself than it had been in 1965, and in April 1975 the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell into the hands of North Vietnamese forces (Veith 2012).

In 1975, also, the withdrawal of most American troops from South East Asia resulted in the assumption of power of communist governments in neighbouring Laos and Cambodia. The new Cambodian government was ultra-nationalist, as well as communist. Although the Khmer Rouge, as the Cambodian communist forces were known, had formerly been allied with North Viet Nam, their claims to the old lands of the Cambodian kingdom in southern Viet Nam led to border conflicts between Cambodia and Viet Nam. These resulted in war in late 1978, and in January 1979 Vietnamese forces invaded and occupied Cambodia. China, an ally of Cambodia, in turn invaded Viet Nam from the north. Vietnamese forces beat back the Chinese, but this reawakened old ethnic antagonisms against ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam (Evans and Rowley 1984).

## **2.2 Involuntary migration**

The fall of Saigon produced the first great wave of international involuntary migration out of Viet Nam. Some Vietnamese who had been associated with the American war effort or with the government of South Viet Nam managed to leave with the last Americans to get out. In late 1975, as North Vietnamese forces took power in Saigon, the United States evacuated about 65,000 'high-risk' individuals from Viet Nam by air and sea. Others began to flee as well, often by boat into the South China Sea. In response, the United States created Operation New Life, which moved refugees to US military bases to prepare them for temporary resettlement in the United States. This brought in 126,000 Vietnamese, most of whom were relatively well educated and familiar with American society (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Bankston and Hidalgo 2007).

The term 'boat people' came into common use in the late 1970s and early 1980s to describe Vietnamese refugees who fled in any craft available. These involuntary migrants now seem like an eerie prefiguration of the later seaborne refugees from the Mediterranean to Europe. The clash between Viet Nam and Cambodia, provoking additional fighting between Viet Nam and China, created a refugee crisis recognized around the world. In 1978, Viet Nam was home to 1.5 million people of Chinese descent, about 85 per cent of whom lived in former South Viet Nam. During the military confrontation with China, the Vietnamese government came to see these Sino-Vietnamese as a potential fifth column. The prominent role of many Sino-Vietnamese in business activities also made them suspicious in the eyes of the anti-capitalist Vietnamese authorities. Motivated by these suspicions, the government in Hanoi launched a series of campaigns against ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam, leading the latter to flee by land into southern China and by boat into the South China Sea (Duiker 1989). An estimated 250,000 people entered China and thousands of others fled by boat. Many died at sea, but others made it to destinations in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, where refugee camps arose to accommodate the new arrivals.

One distinction between the 'boat people' crisis of the late twentieth century and the twenty-first century refugee crisis in and around the Mediterranean was that the former met with a more organized and unified international response. In July 1979, at an international conference in Geneva, developed countries, including the United States, agreed to accept and resettle South East Asian refugees. Under the auspices of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), processing centres for Vietnamese and other South East Asian refugees bound for the

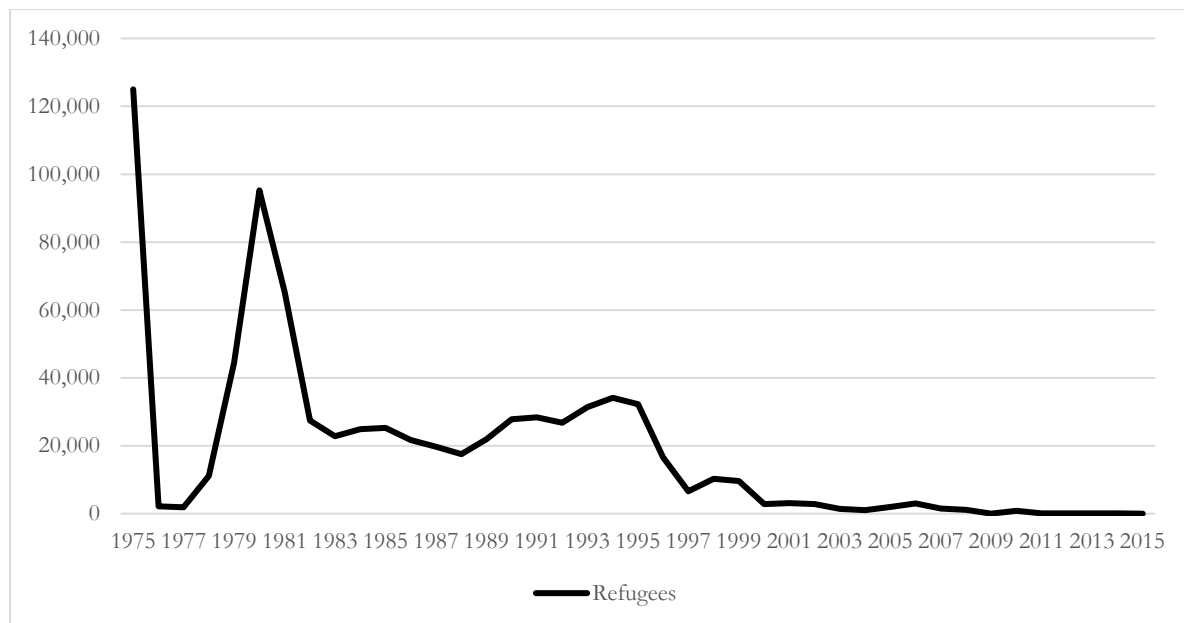
United States or other countries were established in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. Additional refugee camps were established as holding centres for those who had not been approved for resettlement. While this response to involuntary migration was far from ideal, the overseas processing centres and camps did create a means of preparing and channelling refugees in a manageable fashion (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

### 2.3 Resettlement

The waves of refugees from Viet Nam, along with subsequent economic or family migration, greatly expanded Vietnamese-descent populations around the world. France, Germany, Australia, Canada, and other countries resettled tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees during the 1980s and 1990s. The United States, however, took the lion’s share, serving as the destination for hundreds and thousands of refugees, and has since become home to the largest Vietnamese population outside of Viet Nam.

Figure 1 gives numbers of people with Vietnamese nationality admitted to the United States as refugees from 1975 to 2015. As this figure illustrates, 1975 saw the single largest number of refugee admissions. In April of that year, responding to the impending fall of Saigon, President Gerald Ford authorized the entry of 130,000 refugees from the three countries of Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam) into the United States, 125,000 of whom were Vietnamese. This first large group of Vietnamese in the United States typically had close ties with the American military and tended to be the elite of South Viet Nam. According to data collected by the US Department of State in 1975, more than 30 per cent of the heads of households in the first large group of arrivals were trained in the medical professions or in technical or managerial occupations, 16.9 per cent were in transportation occupations, and 11.7 per cent were in clerical and sales occupations. Only 4.9 per cent were fishermen or farmers, occupations held by the majority of the adult population in Viet Nam. More than 70 per cent of the first-wave refugees from this overwhelmingly rural nation came from urban areas.

Figure 1: Vietnamese refugee admissions to the United States, 1975–2015



Source: Authors’ illustration based on data from Office of Refugee Resettlement 1982–2001; Office of Immigration Statistics 2000–15; Rumbaut 2000, 182.

Upon arrival, the first-wave Vietnamese refugees were received in refugee camps, where they were prepared for resettlement. After they were interviewed, given medical examinations, and assigned to living quarters, they were sent to voluntary agencies, or VOLAGs. These VOLAGs, the largest of which was the United States Catholic Conference, assumed the task of finding sponsors, individuals, or groups who would assume financial and personal responsibility for refugee families for up to two years (Zhou and Bankston 1998). Despite the fact that many first-wave arrivals were from privileged backgrounds, few were well prepared to take up a new life in America. The majority did not speak English, and all found themselves in the midst of a strange culture. The American refugee agencies attempted to scatter them around the country, so that this new Asian population would not be too visible in any one place and so that no one city or state would be burdened with caring for a large number of new arrivals. Nevertheless, although at least 1 per cent of the South East Asian population in 1976 resided in each of twenty-nine states, California had already become home to the largest number of refugees, with 21.6 per cent of all the South East Asians in the United States (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

As shown in Figure 1, numbers of Vietnamese refugees admitted dropped sharply after 1975. However, the numbers began to surge in 1978 as a result of an enlarged resettlement programme developed in response to the lobbying of concerned American citizens and organizations. The conflicts between Cambodia and Viet Nam and Viet Nam and China also resulted in another sharp spike in refugee arrivals from Viet Nam. After the 1980 peak, the influx of Vietnamese refugees continued as a steady stream, at 20,000 per year throughout the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.

Changes in refugee policy facilitated the new openness to the settlement of involuntary immigrants from South East Asia. In late May 1979, an agreement between the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the government of Viet Nam created the Orderly Departure Program (ODP). This programme was aimed primarily at bringing former South Vietnamese soldiers and others with close ties to the Americans, along with their families, to the United States. The ODP allowed persons interviewed and approved for resettlement by US officials in Viet Nam to leave by plane with their Vietnamese passports. By 1989, 165,000 Vietnamese had been admitted to the United States under this programme, and the number grew to over 200,000 by the mid-1990s.

The South East Asian refugee crisis also led the US Congress to pass the most comprehensive piece of refugee legislation in American history, the Refugee Act of 1980. In place of the 'seventh preference category' established in 1965, which admitted refugees as part of the total number of immigrants allowed into the US, the Refugee Act provided for an annual number of admissions for refugees. This number was to be independent of the number of immigrants permitted, and it was to be established each year by the president in consultation with Congress.

During the years of the American military involvement, US soldiers had left behind a large number of children born of Vietnamese mothers. Some of these children resettled in the United States as early as 1975, but the physically distinct Amerasians who remained behind were often targets of discrimination and prejudice. About 6000 Amerasians and 11,000 of their relatives migrated under the provisions of the ODP. The Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988 granted Amerasians and their families special status, essentially allowing mixed-ancestry Vietnamese and their close relatives to enter the United States on the basis of appearance.

In 1989, the United States and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam agreed that current and former detainees in Vietnamese re-education camps would be allowed to leave for the United States. Following the Humanitarian Operation Program of 1989, political prisoners, most of whom had been civilian and military officials in South Viet Nam, along with their families, made up the largest

group of Vietnamese entering the United States. By the late 1990s, over 70,000 people had been resettled under this programme.

Within the United States, the work of integrating refugees fell mainly to VOLAGs, which were usually private charitable organizations. The VOLAGs were contracted by the US government to take immediate responsibility for the resettlement of refugees, who were usually assigned to specific agencies prior to arrival. The VOLAGs had to find sponsors who would take personal and financial responsibility for the new arrivals for up to two years. Local groups received funding from the government to provide housing, tutoring in English, vocational training and employment, and legal services (Lanphier 1983).

After the United States and Viet Nam re-established formal diplomatic relations the refugee flow from Viet Nam dropped sharply, and it mostly came to an end by the twenty-first century (see Figure 1). Although the US had been home to very few people of Vietnamese background in 1970, by 2015 there were nearly 2 million American citizens and residents of Vietnamese descent. This population was created, directly or indirectly, by refugee resettlement.

### 3 Social mobility of Vietnamese in the United States

Two decades ago, in *Growing Up American*, we described Vietnamese young adults in 1980 as ‘not just foreign-born, but ‘fresh off the boat,’ suffering from many of the problems confronted by other refugees in flight from a poor country like Viet Nam ... Given the low starting point, [by 1990, their] progress was substantial’ (Zhou and Bankston 1998, 61). This progress has continued over the years, and in general has resulted in substantial upward mobility and entry into the core of American society for many Vietnamese refugees.

#### 3.1 English language proficiency

English ability can be considered one of the most basic requirements for mobility in a predominantly English-speaking country. In *Growing Up American*, we noted that many newly arrived Vietnamese did not speak English or did not speak it well, and that by 1990, the self-reported English proficiency of the Vietnamese exceeded that of the US foreign-born population as a whole (Zhou and Bankston 1998). Table 1 updates this observation with census data from the American Community Survey (ACS).

Table 1: English-speaking abilities of Vietnamese in the US, 1980 and 2015

	1980 (%)	2015 (%)
Speaks no English	9.2	6.5
Speaks not well	29.8	21.6
Speaks well	35.4	22.5
Speaks very well	29.7	35.1
Speaks only English	5.8	14.2

Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

In 1980, nearly 40 per cent of Vietnamese spoke no English or spoke it ‘not well’, despite generally good English language skills among first-wave Vietnamese refugees. That percentage dropped to about 28 per cent in 2015. In 1980, about a third reported speaking English ‘very well’ or ‘English only’; that percentage increased to nearly half in 2015. The English monolinguals also increased from 5.8 per cent thirty years earlier to 14.2 per cent.



### 3.2 Labour market participation

In *Growing Up American*, we also noted that many indicators of Vietnamese socioeconomic position were fairly dismal in the early years of their resettlement, but that these had brightened considerably by 1990 (Zhou and Bankston 1998). In Table 2, we present the mean Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI) scores and employment status of working-age Vietnamese in the United States for selected years of the ACS. As shown, the SEI scores steadily increased in each period from 1980 to 2010, and remained unchanged from 2010 to 2015. The table clearly reflects a trend of measurable upward mobility, although the SEI scores of the Vietnamese were still somewhat below those of the general American labour force (39.38 versus 43.59 in 2015).

Table 2: Mean Socioeconomic Index scores of Vietnamese in the US labour force and employment status (in percentages) of US Vietnamese aged 25–64, 1980–2015

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
<b>Mean SEI</b>	34.08	36.7	37.58	39.68	39.38
<i>Employment status</i>					
Not in labour force	36.2	25.6	30.8	19.7	19.8
Unemployed	4.9	6.2	2.7	7.6	3.4
Employed	58.9	68.2	66.5	72.7	76.8

Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

The SEI scores clearly indicate upward mobility among those in the labour force. But how have labour force participation rates changed over time? Again, in *Growing Up American*, we found that labour force participation rates among working-age Vietnamese had increased in the ten-year period after 1980 (Zhou and Bankston 1998). While unemployment fluctuated, as seen in Table 2, it remained fairly low. By 2015, 77 per cent of working-age Vietnamese were employed. This rate was higher than that of working-age Americans in general (73 per cent).

### 3.3 A mixed-niche strategy

The Vietnamese are incorporated into the American labour market via a mixed-niche strategy. Bankston (2014) described the mixed pattern of engaging in small-scale self-employment, personal services, and labour as a consequence of ethnic network utilization to develop effective mobility strategies. Comparing the employment distribution of Vietnamese, Koreans, and Chinese using the 1980 census data, we found that the Vietnamese were spread across a wider range of industries and that they showed a lower rate of self-employment (Zhou and Bankston 1992). Just as ethnic networks created residential communities through secondary migration, though, those networks also shifted economic activities during the 1980s. For example, in our examination of Vietnamese employment in Louisiana, we found that the Vietnamese there had largely moved out of manufacturing jobs and into fishing and food-related industries from 1980 to 1990, and that self-employment in fishing, small groceries, and eating and drinking places had increased sharply (Bankston and Zhou 1996). Unlike groceries and restaurants, work in fishing is regional in character, concentrated along the coasts. Still, the means by which the Vietnamese became concentrated in fishing are illustrative of broader network processes. Our Vietnamese informants told us that they went into fishing because of a lack of opportunities in the wider economy. 'Like agriculture, another extractive industry that employs a disproportionate share of minority workers', we reported, 'the fishing industry has a demand for low wage manual labor' (Bankston and Zhou 1996, 48). Thus, the Vietnamese in fishing represented one tendency within the new American globalized work setting: a low-wage immigrant labour force. This tendency can be seen elsewhere, such as in the seafood processing industries that have emerged all along the Gulf Coast that rely heavily on Mexican and Central American immigrant labour (Bankston 2012).

The reconcentration of the Vietnamese into fairly dense ethnic clusters around the United States also made possible upward mobility through ethnic entrepreneurship. In our study of Vietnamese in fishing, our informants reported that they had been able to purchase fishing boats by pooling incomes and assisting each other (Bankston and Zhou 1996). The same network assets that enabled them to buy boats (and hire other Vietnamese to work on the boats) also enabled them to go into other businesses, notably in the service sector, at the interstices of the contemporary American economy.

Within the personal-service-oriented American consumer economy, the Vietnamese beauty and nail salon became almost a stereotypical occupation. Indeed, the 2010–15 ACS data show that ‘hairdressers and beauticians’ made up over 13 per cent of all Vietnamese Americans in the labour force—more than any other occupational concentration (Ruggles et al. 2010). Bankston (2014) has recently taken a close look at manicures and pedicures as a special occupational niche for the Vietnamese. He found that this particular niche is made possible by the expansion of demand for personal services in the American economy. The way the Vietnamese moved into this specialization, however, entails interpersonal connections within families looking for opportunities within underserved markets. The story of Binh Nguyen, founder and president of the Vietnamese-American Chamber of Commerce in the Washington, DC, area, offers a good example. Mr Nguyen owned a number of businesses, but the foundation of his success was an academy he owned in Virginia that trained Vietnamese nail technicians. His relatives moved into the manicure business after arriving in California in the early 1980s, and they brought Mr Nguyen’s mother into the business. She, in turn, insisted that her son learn to do nails. When California became too crowded with manicurists, the family re-established itself in the Washington area (Lazo 2012).

The re-clustering of the Vietnamese into ethnic communities enabled them to move into small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Just as ethnic networks formed within the context of their resettlement in the new country, though, these networks could only give them access to positions available. Some became part of the internationalized working class, while others entered the lower-level service jobs. Still others were able to follow the middle-man minority path of immigrant retailers serving minority customers. Thus, when the Vietnamese were able to use ethnic ties to raise funds, these funds sometimes went into opening small corner grocery stores in locations that were underserved by the big chains. Even more often, though, the funds went into opening service-oriented businesses such as ethnic restaurants, especially Vietnamese noodle places, and beauty or nail shops. In collaborating to raise funds or hiring co-ethnics or recruiting family members to work in businesses, the Vietnamese organized their networks around a mixture of occupational niches.

Table 3: Distribution of US Vietnamese (in percentages) in the labour force across major occupational categories, 1980–2015

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
Managerial and professional specialty	12.6	16.7	20.5	23.3	26.1
Technical, sales, and admin. support	26.8	30.4	25.4	22.2	21.8
Service	16.6	14.9	18.5	29.1	29.2
Farming, forestry, fishing	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.0
Precision production, craft, and repair	10.9	11.0	10.5	8.1	7.6
Operators, fabricators, and labourers	32.1	25.2	23.4	15.9	14.1
Military	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.2

Source: Authors’ illustration based on American Community Survey data.

Table 3 suggests that this mixed-niche strategy has paid off for the Vietnamese by enabling them to move into better jobs within the occupational mainstream. In 1980, only 13 per cent of Vietnamese in the labour force held managerial and professional specialty occupations. By 2015,

though, over one-quarter (26 per cent) were in jobs in this category. Service occupations constituted another area of growth for members of this refugee-origin group, increasing from 17 per cent in 1980 to 29 per cent in 2015.

Table 4 looks at the top fifteen occupations the Vietnamese held in 2015. The finding is consistent with the idea that the economic identification was combined with a clear trend of moving into service-oriented occupations. By far the largest concentration was in personal appearance work, indicating the significance of pedicures and manicures as an ethnic niche providing a basis for mobility. Another occupation in the top fifteen list was in the related field of hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists.

Table 4: Fifteen most common occupations of US Vietnamese, 2015

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>% Vietnamese workers</b>
Personal appearance workers	13.69
Assemblers and fabricators	2.62
Cashiers	2.39
Waiters and waitresses	2.08
Chefs and cooks	2.07
Accountants and auditors	2.05
Retail salespersons	1.89
First-line supervisors of sales workers	1.79
Managers	1.74
Other production workers	1.66
Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists	1.63
Software developers, applications, and systems software	1.45
Computer scientists and systems analysts	1.37
Customer service representatives	1.29
Registered nurses	1.27
<i>Cumulative %</i>	<b>38.98</b>

Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

Jobs as cashiers, waiters and waitresses, and cooks and chefs were also common, a fact consistent with restaurants as one of the ethnic niches of the Vietnamese in the US. However, it is also notable that some of the most common occupations were in high-tech fields, such as software developers, computer scientists, and systems analysts. In general, the picture is of a group with high labour force participation, a fair amount of representation in ethnic niche industries, but also employment in technical and managerial fields.

### 3.4 Upward social mobility

Turning to key socioeconomic indicators, the Vietnamese in the US showed a general trend of improving economic and educational situation. Table 5 gives poverty rates, inflation-adjusted median household incomes, and home-ownership rates of the Vietnamese. In 1980, the Vietnamese had a median household income of US\$47,338 (calculated in 2017 dollars). By contrast, the equivalent inflation-adjusted median income for all US households in that year was \$52,397. In the following two decades, there was a striking rise in household financial status among Vietnamese, reaching \$72,000 in 2015. This figure was substantially above the median household income for all American households (\$58,000 in 2017 dollars).

Further, Table 5 indicates that the poverty rates of the Vietnamese plunged as their median household incomes grew. In *Growing Up American*, we noted that persistently high rates of unemployment and poverty continued to be problem areas for the Vietnamese in 1990, despite

modest progress (Zhou and Bankston 1998). At the century’s turn, however, poverty rates among the Vietnamese continued to drop and then levelled off at around 16 per cent between 2000 and 2015. This rate was similar to that for the general US population. In terms of financial situations, the Vietnamese had come to look very much like the general US population by the 2000s.

Table 5: Poverty rate, median household income, and home ownership rate among US Vietnamese, 1980–2015

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
Poverty (%)	35.8	26.0	16.5	15.5	16.6
Median household income (\$)	47,338	64,002	76,166	72,078	72,034
Own home (%)	34.7	47.9	58.2	68.5	70.8

Source: Authors’ illustration based on American Community Survey data.

While the figures in Table 5 make the Vietnamese look similar to other Americans, some of the processes leading to these results may have been distinctive. In considering the achievement in home ownership, for example, it may be worthwhile to recall remarks made by a Vietnamese American religious leader whom we interviewed in our earlier study:

Some Americans were asking me, ‘how is it that you people just come to America and almost right away you can buy houses and have all these things?’ So I took them out to visit some families to see how we live and how we manage to come up with the money to buy our homes. Two families would move in together and all work and save their money. Or someone who doesn’t have a home will move in with a relative who owns one and won’t have to pay any rent, so they can save all their money until they can buy a home of their own. (Luong, personal communication, 15 March 1993)

We will return in the next section to discussing what these interpersonal processes mean for refugee integration and for policies intended to promote integration and mobility. For now, we can observe that home-ownership rates among Vietnamese in the United States went up steadily over the decades. In 2015, over 70 per cent of Vietnamese lived in their own housing, doubling their own home-ownership rate of 1980 and also surpassing the 2015 US average (65 per cent).

Another key mobility indicator is the level of educational attainment. In *Growing Up American*, written two decades ago, we observed that many Vietnamese children and young adults showed remarkable levels of educational achievement and attainment, despite the often limited educational backgrounds of parents and the fact that parents were generally newcomers to American society (Zhou and Bankston 1998). We made this observation with two major caveats, though. First, we pointed out that the generally high scholastic performance of young Vietnamese could lead to overlooking a substantial number of alienated young people who were integrated neither in their own ethnic communities nor in the American mainstream. Second, we raised the possibility of a generational decline affected by rapid acculturation and family socioeconomic disadvantages.

In a 2006 follow-up on the question of generational decline, we did find that many Vietnamese young people had become less integrated into their communities, that there were signs of increases in delinquency, and that scholastic performance had decreased among part of the American-born and American-reared second generation (Zhou and Bankston 2006). We attributed this in part to the loss of the immigrant drive through rapid acculturation and in part to the fact that some Vietnamese young people from low-income families were integrating into the less advantageous segments of American society.

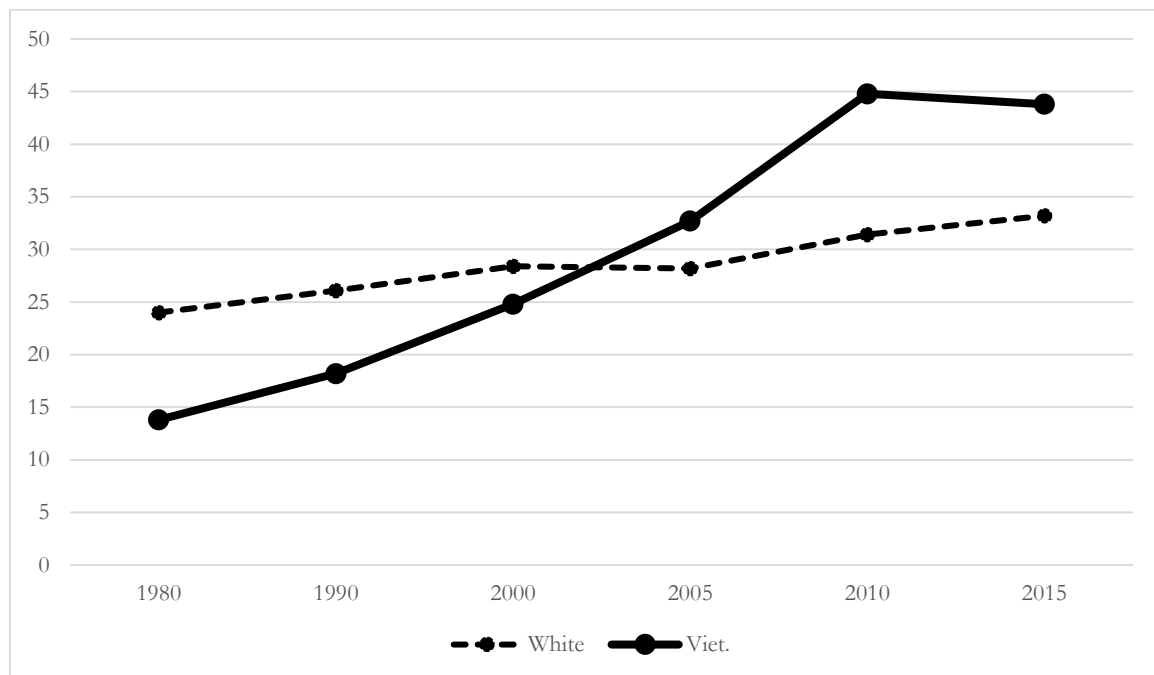
Thus, a spike in upward mobility should not always be expected among those who have already found places within the host society’s mainstream. While the children of immigrants tend to fare

better than their immigrant parents on average, such intergenerational comparison is one-sided and can be misleading. In our view, ‘decline’ is a relative concept. One should be comparing not only native-born children with their immigrant parents, but also native-born children of a particular national-origin group with the general native-born population in the host society, as well as children of immigrants with close connections to their ethnic communities with their counterparts without those ethnic connections. One should also be considering how outcomes for each grouping vary depending on the opportunities provided by socioeconomic situation (Zhou and Bankston 2016, 119).

Taking these reservations into consideration, we emphasize that the average educational progress of Vietnamese in the United States should not be taken as a stereotype. Overall positive outcomes may mask real within-group variations. Further, indicators of upward mobility through education are mainly meaningful by contrast with the larger society, and once members of a group have entered relatively advantaged socioeconomic levels, wellbeing often indicates a passing on of advantage, rather than a high rate of upward mobility.

Figure 2 contrasts the college completion rates of Vietnamese American young adults aged 25–40 with those of white Americans in the same age group. In 1980, only 14 per cent of Vietnamese young adults had finished four years of college, compared with 24 per cent of whites. Two decade later, the gap had narrowed to 25 per cent of Vietnamese and 28 per cent of whites. By 2005, Vietnamese American young adults were more likely to have completed four years of college than whites were, and by 2010, 45 per cent of Vietnamese in the relevant age cohort had attained this level of education, compared with only 31 per cent of whites. Although the educational attainment of the Vietnamese levelled off from 2010 to 2015, it is remarkable that a young generation of Vietnamese Americans is showing a very high rate of mobility and integration into the relatively advantaged segment of the US population.

Figure 2: Percentages of white and Vietnamese young adults (25–40) with four or more years of college, 1980–2015



Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

However, the question of mobility is not only about how much education one has attained but also about whether one's level of education fits the increasing demand from the labour market. From this perspective, college-educated Vietnamese seem to be poised for continuing upward mobility into the future. Table 6 gives the twenty most common fields of study among Vietnamese college graduates in 2015. As shown, the most common degree fields were biology and accounting, followed by computer science, electrical engineering, and business management. Almost all of the concentration areas of Vietnamese college graduates, in fact, were in fields of high labour market demand.

Table 6: Twenty most common fields of study among US Vietnamese college graduates, 2015

<b>Field of study</b>	<b>% Vietnamese college graduates</b>
1. Biology	6.9
2. Accounting	6.9
3. Computer science	6.4
4. Electrical engineering	6.3
5. Business management and administration	4.6
6. General business	3.8
7. Nursing	3.1
8. Psychology	2.9
9. Finance	2.8
10. Economics	2.8
11. General education	2.4
12. General engineering	2.3
13. Marketing and marketing research	2.1
14. Chemistry	2.1
15. Mechanical engineering	1.9
16. Pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences	1.8
17. Biochemical sciences	1.6
18. Computer and information systems	1.4
19. Mathematics	1.4
20. Management information systems and statistics	1.3
<i>Cumulative %</i>	<b>64.4</b>

Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

Our analysis of the census data above clearly suggests that Vietnamese refugees and their children have achieved rapid upward mobility over the decades since they began arriving in large numbers in the United States in the mid-1970s. We now turn our attention to explaining this mobility trend.

## **4 Explaining upward mobility of an involuntary migrant group**

### **4.1 Influences on adaptation and upward mobility**

Our analysis above has provided an image of a refugee-origin population that has successfully negotiated resettlement in the United States. While we want to avoid suggesting that Vietnamese Americans are free from problems, we believe that the central question is how their socioeconomic success is achieved. Answering this question may provide some insight into processes and lessons for policy in refugee resettlement in general.

In *Growing Up American*, we found that the Vietnamese community of New Orleans, Louisiana, had been able to adapt economically and socially to an environment radically different from their

South East Asian homeland through building a dense network of social relations based on ethnic identity, kinship ties, and mutual obligation. This ethnic network was anchored in a religious institution (a church) at its centre. For adults, this network enabled the pooling of resources, the co-ordination of activities, and the distribution of information about opportunities. For young people, the web of ethnic social relations provided support and control that would channel them toward success in American schools while insulating them from the sense of alienation and exclusion often felt by young people of native ethnic minorities (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Other researchers, following our line of reasoning, and our own follow-up work have elaborated on the specific mechanisms and functions of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans (Zhou and Bankston 2006; Bankston 2014; Vanlandingham 2017). In a study detailing how the Vietnamese community of New Orleans recovered from near-total destruction by Hurricane Katrina, Vanlandingham (2017) highlights the cultural and non-cultural influences on disaster recovery and draws explicit connections between the two. He describes the cultural influences on the adaptation of the Vietnamese to challenging situations as shared narratives, symbolic boundaries, frames, and toolkits.

Shared narratives refer to ‘accounts that are repeated and shared within a community to help explain why things happened (and happen) the way they did (and do), help formulate a community’s common identity, and help individual members make sense of their lives’ (Vanlandingham 2017, 81–82). For the Vietnamese, the story of war, flight, relocation, and progress in the new homeland created a compelling story for group members. This was not just an account that those who had actually fled could draw on for motivation, but one that they could pass on to their American-reared and American-born children. Instead of living isolated, alienated, and disheartened in a strange world, they could define themselves as not just surviving, but triumphing over adversity. These narratives play a part in creating symbolic boundaries, the identities that distinguish insiders and outsiders. By frames, Vanlandingham means outlooks or perspectives. For the Vietnamese, cultural frames entail three key elements: (1) ‘insularity’, by which group members must rely primarily on themselves; (2) ‘hierarchy’, or the perspective that there is a pattern of leadership or authority that members of the Vietnamese community should respect and follow, which includes lines of authority both within families and in the ethnic community respected by group members in general; and (3) ‘toolkits’, which Vanlandingham draws from the influential work of Ann Swidler (1986), referring to the capacity for drawing selectively on elements within a cultural heritage and for adjusting and transforming those elements to new situations. These cultural factors interact with larger contextual factors to lead to desirable outcomes in disaster recovery, which offers firm evidence to support our theory of ethnic social relations (Vanlandingham 2017).

Our own research has led us to conclude that answers may lie in the interaction between cultural factors and meso-level community organizations and resettlement agencies (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Bankston 2014). The effectiveness of national policies depends heavily on how broader national policies promote and co-ordinate this interaction. Some may object that cultural explanations of group adaptation do not readily lend themselves to social policies. It may be argued that adaptation is simply a matter of whether group members have cultural resources that do or do not function to affect outcomes efficiently. To this type of objection, we offer two responses. First, if refugee agencies or policymakers intend to help new arrivals, they must try to understand what resources those new arrivals possess, including cultural resources. Second, culture does not come out of a vacuum, and it changes and develops continually.

The cultural resources work together with non-cultural aspects of resilience. These include immigrants’ own human and social capital. Immigrants, even those that migrate involuntarily, may have specific skills or forms of education. They may also have insider knowledge from other group

members. Along these lines, Bankston (2014) observes that even immigrant groups at the bottom of the American socioeconomic ladder often have and share information about jobs within occupational niches. The Vietnamese also have had some specific group advantages, such as generally positive stereotypes among the wider population. The Vietnamese in New Orleans, the community studied by Vanlandingham and by us, also enjoyed some local advantages, such as resettlement in a single location of people largely from the same location in Viet Nam. The local nature of immigrant adaptation means, of course, that there will be variation within a broad pattern of mobility. Even if Vietnamese in general have been relatively successful in the new homeland, this success varies by community social structures.

This observation has been supported by the interesting work of Vy Dao (2015), who compared the New Orleans Vietnamese community with two others along the Gulf Coast (one in Biloxi, Mississippi, and the other in Bayou La Batre, Alabama) to explain the variations in the capacities of Vietnamese communities to rebuild themselves in disaster recovery. During the aftermath of the hurricane, in particular, Dao focused on analysing the role of social organizations to address the question of why the Vietnamese community in New Orleans seemed to mobilize so quickly while others were less able to do so.

The Vietnamese of Bayou La Batre first arrived in 1977 but their numbers did not increase in earnest until 1981, and then, almost immediately, the new arrivals began occupying seafood processing jobs, deck work, and trawling (Herndon 1988). Within a few short years, many began buying their own boats or retrofitting leisure craft for commercial fishing purposes at such a pace that by the mid-1980s nearly one in three licenses in Bayou La Batre were registered by Vietnamese. During 30 years of settling into the area, and after initial struggles with American fishermen, most Vietnamese fishermen found that extractive work offered one of the few viable avenues to financial security. Arriving from circumstances of severe hardship, most of the Vietnamese families did not belong to the more privileged and educated first-wave co-ethnics who were evacuated immediately after the 1976 fall of Saigon (Rutledge 1992).

The Vietnamese of Bayou La Batre worked together often in family-based groups, but largely worked independently of one another in the same fishing, shrimping, and seafood processing activities. Without a strong ethnic community centre, their social organization was relatively 'flat', and they did not have the same degree of what Vanlandingham calls 'hierarchy'. They were also concentrated in an economically volatile industry, given to ups and downs in demand in the larger economy. They were able to re-establish themselves following the hurricane, but limited social and economic resources meant that they struggled to adapt in a changing environment.

The Vietnamese of Biloxi are much less concentrated residentially than their co-ethnics in either Bayou La Batre or New Orleans. They were drawn to the area by jobs initially in seafood processing during the 1980s and later, at the turn of the twenty-first century, in gaming as a major Gulf Coast industry to replace seafood processing as the most significant niche employment for Mississippi Vietnamese. Employment and housing availability has distributed them in varying neighbourhoods. Although many Vietnamese on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were drawn to the area by ethnic networks, spreading news first of seafood employment and later of jobs in casinos, they were much less tightly interconnected and bounded by ethnic networks than those who settled in New Orleans. Moreover, casinos drove up the cost of housing, which pushed the Vietnamese out to neighbourhoods close to their employment and dispersed them all around Biloxi. The loosely interconnected Vietnamese of the Mississippi Gulf Coast had access to economic resources, in the form of jobs, but their ethnic social resources were relatively limited. In turn, the relatively loosely interconnected Vietnamese of Biloxi were not able to create formal organizations before the devastating hurricane hit. In the words of one of Dao's Biloxi informants:



Oh, no, no—there were no organizations, but if you were for example, Catholic, there would be a parish council. And if for example there was a funeral for one of the parishioners, well, the parish council would be responsible for trying to get donations to give to this family that recently lost a loved one, to help pay for the funeral costs. That’s one thing they did, but there was no organization. (Bich Hong Nguyen, quoted in Dao 2015, 84)

While Dao’s Biloxi informants struggled, with some success, to create organizations for recovery and adaptation, the lack of a pre-existing ethnic community constituted a serious challenge. By contrast, the Vietnamese in New Orleans were able to rely on dense ethnic networks, centred on a Catholic church, to form a multiplicity of formal organizations in response to Katrina. Moreover, the secondary migration draw of New Orleans’s Vietnamese community was not chiefly external economic resources, such as employment opportunities, but the social resources provided by ethnic networks (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Bankston 2014; Dao 2015).

Dao’s study can be used as a local-level examination of why some Vietnamese communities in the US have been more adaptable than others. If one accepts the community organization account of the adaptation and mobility of the Vietnamese, and by extension other involuntary migrant groups, this implies that an important role for agencies serving refugees is to identify the social and cultural resources of those groups and foster community assets. Refugee agencies, in other words, should go beyond simply providing housing, connections to employment, and information about the host society. As suggested by Dao’s study, even within a single national-origin group, refugee communities may vary in their levels of social organization and in the mobilization of resources derived from social organization. So refugee service agencies must develop a clear understanding of how the internal dynamics of refugee groups interact with local receiving contexts to make their resettlement work more effective.

#### 4.2 New Orleans and Biloxi: a comparison of two communities

We re-examine two Vietnamese communities—New Orleans (in Orleans Parish, which is identical with the city) and Biloxi (in Harrison County, which is made up of the Biloxi-Gulfport area)—that Dao studied, with data from the ACS. Using the 2001–15 combined ACS data, we can see, in Table 7, that there were some similarities in employment between these two. In both, personal appearance worker was the most common type of occupation, making up 16 per cent of Vietnamese workers in New Orleans and 6 per cent of workers in Biloxi-Gulfport. Waiters and waitresses also made up a common occupational category in both places. The occupational concentrations of the Vietnamese in the US as a whole closely resembled those of these two communities.

Table 7: Top five occupations of Vietnamese in Harrison County, Orleans Parish, and the US, 2001–15

<b>Harrison County (Biloxi-Gulfport)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Orleans Parish (New Orleans)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Personal appearance workers	5.8	1. Personal appearance workers	15.7	1. Personal appearance workers	13.7
2. Gaming workers and supervisors	5.1	2. Cashiers	2.5	2. Assemblers and fabricators	2.6
3. Waiters and waitresses	4.6	3. Supervisors of sales workers	2.4	3. Cashiers	2.4
4. Cashiers	3.6	4. Waiters and waitresses	2.2	4. Waiters and waitresses	2.1
5. Chefs and cooks	3.0	5. Retail sales	1.9	5. Chefs and cooks	2.1

Source: Authors’ illustration based on American Community Survey data.

The distinguishing characteristic of Vietnamese employment in Biloxi is clearly due to the importance of casinos in the region. One out of every twenty Vietnamese workers in this locality worked in the gaming industry as workers or supervisors. When we consider the fact that many of the cashiers, chefs and cooks, and waiters and waitresses would also be working in casinos, the major role of gambling as a source of employment for the Vietnamese in Biloxi becomes even more pronounced. As Table 8 shows, the biggest difference in industries between the two communities was the prominence of miscellaneous entertainment and recreational services, which employed one out of every ten workers in Biloxi-Gulfport. This also distinguishes the Vietnamese of Biloxi from the Vietnamese in the rest of the United States.

Table 8: Top five industries of Vietnamese in Harrison County, Orleans Parish, and the US, 2001–15

<b>Harrison County (Biloxi-Gulfport)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Orleans Parish (New Orleans)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Eating and drinking places	11.1	1. Misc. personal services	15.5	1. Misc. personal services	11.8
2. Misc. entertainment and recreation	9.9	2. Eating and drinking places	6.7	2. Eating and drinking places	7.1
3. Misc. personal services	6.6	3. Hospitals	5.5	3. Electrical equipment, machinery and supplies	4.7
4. Hospitals	3.8	4. Construction	4.0	4. Beauty shops	3.5
5. Misc. food preparation	3.3	5. Beauty shops	3.0	5. Construction	2.5

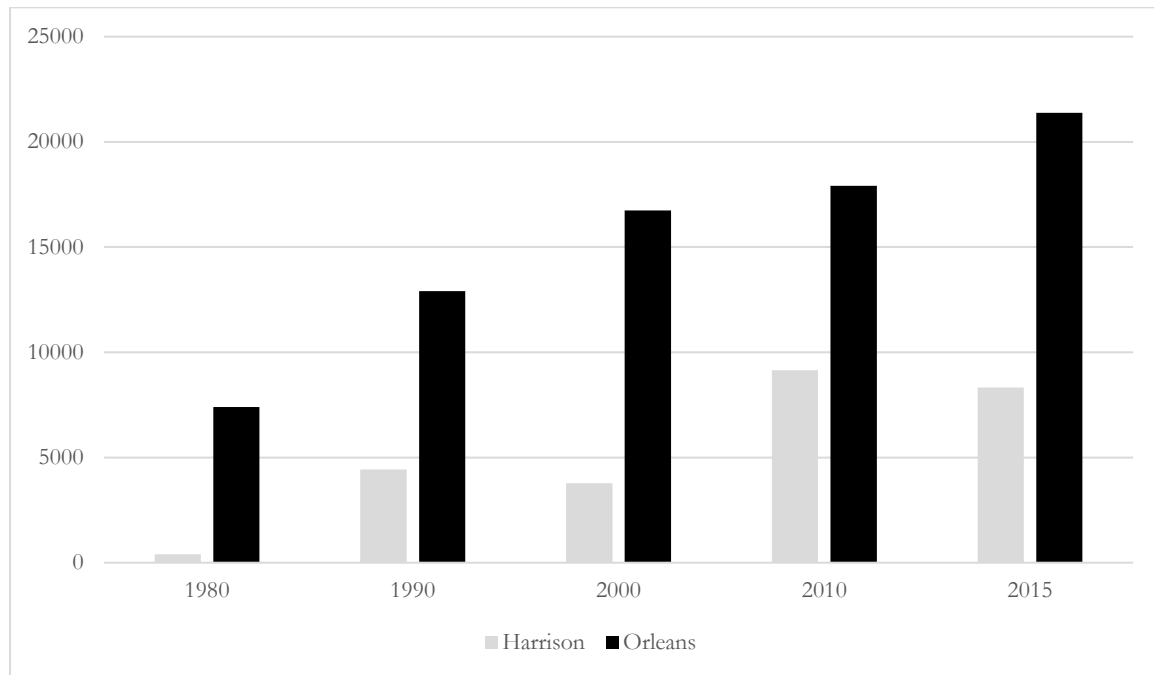
Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

Taking the census data together with the more detailed information from our research and from the works of Vanlandingham and Dao, we can suggest that the influences on the mobility of Vietnamese come from two different kinds of assets: social assets, in the form of interpersonal connections and organizations generated by those connections, and economic assets, in the form of employment opportunities. The Vietnamese of New Orleans were initially resettled in one major neighbourhood, in which they established a strong ethnic community with rich social and economic resources. Others moved there to be with family members and friends. The Vietnamese of the Biloxi-Gulfport area moved there chiefly because there were jobs, and the jobs held them there. The social and economic assets are not mutually exclusive. Co-ethnics can create economic opportunities for group members through setting up ethnic minority businesses. Those who have or know about jobs can also pass information along to co-ethnics, as happened with Vietnamese who communicated with others about the availability of, first, seafood work and, later, casino employment. However, these two kinds of assets have varied in importance between the two communities.

Figure 3 contrasts the population growth in New Orleans and Biloxi-Gulfport. New Orleans, a bigger metropolitan area, was home to more Vietnamese people from the earliest year, 1980. Biloxi-Gulfport showed a rapid increase in population as news of jobs in the area spread. However, while the Vietnamese population in New Orleans has grown steadily, even in the period of Hurricane Katrina, the population in Biloxi-Gulfport has fluctuated: it decreased somewhat from 1990 to 2000, grew again to reach a high point of over 9000 in 2010, and then had shrank by nearly 1000 people just five years later. Our suggestion is that the more volatile population of Biloxi-

Gulfport is a consequence of the fact that it is based on the availability of jobs and tends to grow or shrink with the economy, while a community based on ethnic networks is more self-sustaining.

Figure 3: Vietnamese populations of Orleans Parish (New Orleans) and Harrison County (Biloxi-Gulfport), 1980–2015



Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

Table 9 shows that the Vietnamese of these two communities had Socioeconomic Index scores and employment rates similar to those of the Vietnamese elsewhere in the US. It is not surprising that the Vietnamese in Biloxi-Gulfport had higher rates of employment than those in New Orleans, considering that the availability of jobs was the main driver for the existence of the former community. From 2010 to 2015, though, employment in Biloxi-Gulfport dipped below that of New Orleans and below the national average level, probably because of downturns in employment in the gaming industry.

Table 9: Mean Socioeconomic Index scores and employment rates of Vietnamese in Harrison County, Orleans Parish, and the US, 1990–2015

	1990	2000	2010	2015
<i>Mean SEI</i>				
Harrison County (Biloxi-Gulfport)	36.8	29.5	36.2	40.4
Orleans Parish (New Orleans)	33.6	41.1	40.0	36.9
US	36.7	37.6	39.7	39.4
<i>% employed</i>				
Harrison County (Biloxi-Gulfport)	83.3	78.4	79.5	55.5
Orleans Parish (New Orleans)	62.8	59.5	75.1	74.4
US	68.2	66.5	72.7	76.8

Source: Authors' illustration based on American Community Survey data.

Although there are similarities between the two communities, there are also notable differences in the structure and organization of ethnic communities. In *Growing Up American*, we observed that, since Louisiana's economic opportunities are limited compared with those of many other parts of the country, the existence of ethnic ties was the biggest draw for secondary migrants to New

Orleans. Refugee communities have built up in areas primarily due to four factors—a good economy, an existing Vietnamese community, higher welfare benefits, and warm weather (Rhonda Cooperstein, researcher with the US refugee programme, personal interview, June 14, 1993). ‘Since New Orleans doesn’t have particularly high welfare benefits and its economy has been in a slump, if people are moving to Louisiana I’d say they are going for the community’ (Ashton 1985, 12a).

The Vietnamese community in New Orleans owed its existence to the government programmes and voluntary agencies for resettling refugees in the US. In New Orleans, the main refugee organization operated under Associated Catholic Charities. As elsewhere in the United States, federal authorities pressured local agencies to scatter refugees around the city. However, the local director of Resettlement and Immigration Services, Elise Cerniglia, decided to do just the opposite and place all of the newcomers together. Ms Cerniglia, having earlier been in charge of resettlement of Cuban refugees, believed that refugees should be concentrated so that they could help one another.

I said, ‘no, they need one another.’ So, I started to resettle them in communities. That’s why I looked for housing that could take large numbers of people. The Government saw the success and that’s what they started doing elsewhere ... New Orleans was a pattern for other places, no doubt about it. (Cerniglia, personal communication, 31 March 1994)

While refugee agencies can help seed a community based on ethnic social relations, secondary migration often takes place on the basis of interpersonal linkages. Once the Vietnamese community had been seeded, kinship and friendship brought other Vietnamese to New Orleans. As Ashton (1985) observed above, an existing Vietnamese community became the basis for its own growth and extension.

In contrast, the local economy was the main factor that drew Vietnamese to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The settlement of Vietnamese in the Biloxi-Gulfport area may be traced to the effort of Richard Gollott, owner of the Golden Gulf Seafood processing factory. Gollott had reportedly heard that Vietnamese workers were shucking oysters in New Orleans. Seeking low-wage manual labourers, he began to recruit Vietnamese in New Orleans since seafood processing required little or no English. As word got out that Vietnamese could find jobs in seafood processing on the Gulf Coast, more and more Vietnamese began to arrive.

By the 1990s, casinos were becoming a major economic activity along the Gulf Coast. Following the acceptance of gambling by Biloxi in 1991, gambling became the most important industry of the region. Accordingly, jobs connected to the casinos became a new source of employment for the Vietnamese, and improving English abilities enabled many to work in higher-earning positions in the casinos. At the same time, though, the casinos encouraged the development of real estate and drove up housing costs, leading the Gulf Coast Vietnamese into more widely scattered residential patterns, inhibiting the establishment and maintenance of ethnic organizations (Bankston 2012).

The comparison of two communities at the local level enables us to look more deeply at Vietnamese mobility in the US by emphasizing the role of community in adaptation and the different kinds of assets that ethnic communities may have. While one would normally think that the availability of jobs was the most important resource for new arrivals, this comparison suggests that often social capital—reliance on interpersonal relationships and ethnic institutions—can serve as a more reliable foundation. We are not suggesting that resettlement agencies can pick and choose what kinds of community structures are available to involuntary migrants. We do recommend, however, that organizations involved with resettlement identify the kinds of cultural,

economic, and social resources available to new arrivals and consider how to help develop or mobilize those resources to enable mobility in a new location.

## **5 Discussion and recommendations**

The data and existing research on the Vietnamese in the US provide clear evidence that this refugee population, originating in the disasters of war and involuntary migration, has largely integrated well into American society and has achieved substantial upward mobility. Some of this success can be attributed to characteristics specific to the Vietnamese, such as ethno-cultural resources and the unique context of reception, with a warm political climate and welcoming voluntary agencies at the time of arrival. However, we can draw some generalizations for refugee resettlement from this case. We believe that some of these generalizations involve precisely the need to carefully identify and support the specific characteristics of groups that will maximize the potential for mobility. A careful and well-organized plan for the reception of involuntary migrant groups—stages of integration—lies at the core of our recommendations.

### **5.1 Pre-resettlement**

Preparing involuntary migrants for success in a receiving country needs to begin before their resettlement. In the first section of the paper, we discussed the establishment of overseas processing centres at the end of 1979, followed by the Refugee Act of 1980. Bankston worked for several years in a processing centre and observed how these institutions had developed comprehensive programmes in preparation for resettlement. As we described in *Growing Up American*, the processing centres held classes for refugees to learn English and basic skills needed in American workplaces, as well as replicating American primary and secondary schools for children (Zhou and Bankston 1998). However, different demographic groups hold different kinds of cultural assets and social resources. Thus, refugee camps need to move beyond acting only as holding places or training centres. The camps and voluntary organizations must recognize the potential for self-help among refugees and develop mechanisms to assist refugees to interact with each other and support each other. Helping refugees to help themselves can play an important part in preparing them for successful adaptation to a new and strange environment.

Typically, involuntary migrants arrive in refugee camps as isolated individuals or family groups. This early atomization makes it difficult to create or recreate interpersonal networks after resettlement. Agencies that work with refugees can begin to alleviate this situation by encouraging migrants to organize for self-government, to identify their own problems, and to provide representation to the outside world. It would be beneficial, then, even to put the migrants themselves in charge of distributing aid. At this early stage, also, refugee agencies can begin to identify the social resources possessed by groups. This brings in a role for social science even before resettlement. Researchers can attempt to identify the extent to which home country institutions and patterns of behaviour have been disrupted by war and exile. Tentative efforts at finding the cultural resources that may be useful in adapting to a new homeland can start well before resettlement.

### **5.2 Initial resettlement**

Resettlement depends on the willingness of countries and communities to accept involuntary migrants and on the agencies that exist in those countries and communities. The conditions of resettlement, therefore, necessarily vary widely. This means that careful assessment of existing community conditions is necessary. What kinds of housing and jobs are available and what level

of acceptance of new arrivals exists in the receiving location? As the example we gave of Ms Cerniglia's work with the Vietnamese in New Orleans suggests, the importance of not simply placing new arrivals but enabling them to build and rebuild their own social networks can help them to adapt well to a new environment. Further, making the greatest use of the resources available in the place of resettlement depends on those very social networks, which link people to jobs and enable them to help one another in finding housing.

Secondary migration is essential to building refugee communities. The government and voluntary agencies of receiving countries cannot completely control the process of resettlement. In fact, it is desirable that they do not do so. Where involuntary migrants are first placed is not necessarily where they will end up. So resettlement agencies can best do their jobs by helping migrants cluster where the migrants themselves think best. Working with secondary, internal migrants and remaining flexible and open to the expansion of immigrant settlements, then, should be part of the office of settlement agencies.

### **5.3 Finding and supporting ethnic strategies for integration**

As the contrast between the New Orleans and Gulf Coast communities illustrates, there may be just as many similarities among new refugee settlements as variations. Specifically, the mix of external and internal assets of each group in each location can differ. Although ethnic networks contribute to the adaptation and mobility of group members, through connecting people to opportunities and enabling mutual support and co-ordination, some (such as New Orleans) rely more on cultural and interpersonal resources than others. In other locations, an ethnic community may be defined more by the kinds of employment that create or maintain the community, such as seafood processing, casinos, and fishing/shrimping in the Gulf Coast locations. The work of resettlement agencies should involve identifying the kinds of internal and external assets available to newcomers in particular places, helping them recognize their own strengths and challenges, and working on ways to increase different kinds of assets.

Policymakers and agencies should see integration and upward mobility, and not simply placement and survival, as goals of resettlement. This means that developing community organizations, identifying available employment niches, and working with settlers to design flexible strategic plans for social and economic mobility should be central to the resettlement work.

### **5.4 A second-generation focus**

In *Growing Up American*, we looked at the adaptation of the Vietnamese in the United States by examining how the children of a refugee group were doing in their parents' new homeland, and at the determinants of the relative success of the Vietnamese second generation (Zhou and Bankston 1998). In our later work, we argued that the mobility of the second generation is the measure for defining the adaptation of any immigrant group to life in a destination country (Zhou and Bankston 2016; Bankston 2014). The movement of young people into a host society depends on the organization of their parents' national-origin groups and on how these national-origin groups connect to the larger society. In the longer term, then, the focus of mobility studies of involuntary migrants must be on how the interpersonal, institutional, and cultural assets of immigrant groups can co-ordinate with resources available to them from the host society to encourage the progress of the generations coming after migration.

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